

***Hierarchies: The Ladder of Life* by Gertrude W. van Pelt**

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The Ladder of Life

By Gertrude W. Van Pelt, MD

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Chapter 1

Church organization. The dictionary gives as the first meaning "a body of ecclesiastical rulers," and only in the third definition suggests a wider application, such as that of kingdoms, classes, orders, families, genera, and species. Practically, the word is of ecclesiastical association. The reason for this is no doubt due to the fact that during the dark ages it was only in the ancient Mystery schools that the real teaching of hierarchies was given, as the fundamental, universal scheme of nature. These secret schools dealt with the problems of life and death, and were known as the highest court of authority. But as they declined, due to the prevailing social conditions, and were finally closed in the sixth century, certain teachings in a limited and restricted form remained in the public mind associated with the religions, which were really the degenerated shadows of the Mystery schools.

During the early centuries of this era, several religions were contending for general acceptance. When finally the Christians gained supremacy, their religion was naturally colored with the old beliefs and forms familiar to and loved by many of the people. The influence of the Stoics, the Neopythagoreans, and Neoplatonists was evident, but especially the last named left its mark. This was largely due to certain writings which appeared in the fifth or sixth century purporting to have been written by Dionysius the Areopagite — a man who, according to the Christian legend, was one of the first converts of Paul when he preached on Mars Hill in Athens. The real author was evidently a man of that later time who was in sympathy with the Neoplatonists' teachings, but who for some reason, possibly social or financial, worked under the banner of the dominant Church. At heart he was a Greek pagan, and perhaps wishing to save Christianity from pure exotericism and to illuminate it, he seems to have adopted a method of introducing some of the old teachings in a modified form which would influence the people in their favor. His effort was reinforced through the influence of schools of learning active at that time in Alexandria, the great center of Hellenistic culture. However this may be, these writings profoundly influenced the Christian Church about the fifth or sixth century, and to this day are found among the canonical works. Among them was a treatise on the Divine Hierarchies, which taught that God, being infinite, worked through lesser divinities of graded development, each lower being derived from the one above it, thus following in a general way the Kabbala and the Neoplatonists — only instead of using their terms, he adopted names more congenial to Christian thought. These terms were: God, as the Summit; then Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, forming the first triad; then Dominations, Virtues, Powers, as the second triad; and Principalities, Archangels, Angels, as the third triad; making ten stages or grades. And this, in substance, is the fifth definition in the dictionary.

The essence of the meaning of this teaching has long since passed out of the Christian religion, and probably was clearly grasped only in the very early years of our era by a relatively limited number of people. Esoterically the term has a special significance which we will try to develop. Exoterically it applies to any organized combination held together by a head, having under him a graded series of subordinates, each of them being responsible to the one directly above him. The army of a nation is an excellent example of a hierarchy, being organized generally in corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, companies, and other units, on a descending scale.

Human life even on this physical plane is only possible when it is organized after this fashion. Every country has its government, and whatever subordinate divisions of the country may exist, such as states, counties, or what not, all have their rulers and under-rulers. Within these are the cities, with a head manager controlling departments which are under the authority of one of still lower rank. Every business enterprise is carried on in a similar manner. Human activities cannot function otherwise, and there is peace, happiness, and harmony to the degree that the state or any other body is able to preserve these various relationships without friction. On the other hand, there is insecurity, confusion, unrest, social disease, exactly in proportion as the links weaken or become ineffective. In any combination or group of people there must be a central authority which has the confidence and respect of the units if life is to proceed normally. Let this weaken or cease to be present and, in the case of a country, the horror of a revolution is imminent. The climax of terror comes when human passions are let loose in a mob.

and keep to the pattern more perfectly than do their so-called civilized brothers. The necessity for organization is innate.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM NATURE

We see the same thing in the lower kingdoms, especially developed in bees and ants. The bees have their queen with her enormous family of sons or drones and daughters or workers. The latter are divided further into nurses for the young, maids-of-honor to the queen, builders, gatherers of pollen and of nectar for honey-making, and still another group to air and heat or cool the hive, etc. All know and fulfill their various duties. Some are watchers at the door to guide the timid young ones to their hive and to guard the door from enemies. All these together form a harmonious community working under the great law.

The ants represent another organized society. This principle of organization is universal throughout the kingdoms. Botanists see plainly the division of plants into families. Mineralogists see the mathematical precision of nature in the marvelous formation of crystals. But in the ant and bee families we can see nature's plan actually at work. In some ways the ants are even more wonderful than the bees. In the Alleghany Mountains there are 1700 ant mounds covering a space of fifty acres and they are all of one commonwealth. There is a similar division of labor as in the case of the bees: major and minor workers, sentinels for hostile approach, masons, builders, foragers, nurses, queen's bodyguard, and even harvesters and gardeners. These duties are mostly interchangeable, rather more so than in the bee communities. But in the case of the termites, perhaps the most wonderfully organized of all insect communities, there is a very definite division of duties and even a very great modification of the bodily structure into several classes. Yet there is never confusion, never disturbance unless an enemy appears in the fold. The citizens of this commonwealth seem to be so perfectly self-controlled, so absolutely free from any desire to violate law or swerve from duty, that this community of millions thread their ways through innumerable labyrinths as if dominated by some secret and occult guide, infallible and sure.

It is indeed the teaching that the lower kingdoms are informed by higher beings — through remote control, we might say — and they reflect as in a clear surface the harmony above. In the human kingdom we find entirely different conditions. Mind has been awakened and self-consciousness has resulted. We must learn to do for ourselves what higher beings are doing for the lower kingdoms. Moral responsibility follows the awakening of mind, and we must learn through mistakes and suffering to weave the pattern of the gods and make its fabric glow with its own inherent light.

But the human race is young, only a little more than half over its journey on this planet, and it must serve a long, long apprenticeship before it finds itself, and before the units themselves learn each one separately to put its own house in order. Collectively humanity is indeed a child, with all the conceit and self-confidence of childhood, yet instinctively, inevitably it knows that nothing can be carried out, that no project can begin to function, until it is framed in a suitable organization with its central authority.

The animal kingdom, being so closely connected with the human through its bodies of flesh, reflects more of human unrest than do the kingdoms below, but even here we find the hierarchical pattern more or less clearly marked in places. Humans not having overcome the "delusion of separateness" are constantly fighting cooperation through their selfishness, and yet are inevitably drawn into it both by their selfish and their altruistic instincts. Nothing else works. Even criminals are well organized, and have their own codes of honor for self-protection.

These facts are so common that we fail to read their meaning; to see that the innate tendencies in people to shape their lives have their origin in the impulses from higher realms of consciousness, in the vital streams which flow through the natural channels in human nature to the lower planes where the human consciousness

artificial ones are those upon which the undeveloped human beings are practicing, so to say. They are the means through which the undeveloped parts of the human constitution are being molded, thus fitting the human kingdom to take its place in the living tissue of the universe. With these preliminary remarks, we can consider the most evident example of a *real* hierarchy — the human body.

Chapter 2

The Human Body

The human body is a hierarchy in manifestation before our eyes, a little universe in itself on our own physical plane which, could we fathom its meaning, would reveal the mysteries of kosmos. For the human intellect its secrets are a sealed book which only an adept of advanced degree could open. From one point of view it is but a mechanism, a vehicle for the use of higher forces. This is evident, for when these are withdrawn, as at death, it begins at once to crumble, the various entities which have been working together go their own ways, and the hierarchical combination temporarily rests.

When, however, the hierarchy of the body is active, it is the brain which is the dominant factor, the hierarch. But we must understand, of course, that the brain or any other organ is but a transmitter of the energies from entities of higher grades who make up the composite human constitution.

The basis of physical life is the cell, which in manifestation is a sevenfold entity, like man, like the earth, like the sun, like the universe; for every existing form is a reflection of the form above it. The cell contains, among other things, a nucleus, a nucleolus, and an enveloping membrane, which latter corresponds to the body of a human. It has also kosmic correspondences.

"The Spheres of Being, or centres of life, which are isolated nuclei breeding their men and their animals, are numberless; not one has any resemblance to its sister-companion or to any other in its own special progeny."

"All have a double physical and spiritual nature."

"The nucleoles are eternal and everlasting; the nuclei periodical and finite. The nucleoles form part of the absolute. They are the embrasures of that black impenetrable fortress, which is for ever concealed from human or even Dhyanic sight. The nuclei are the light of eternity escaping therefrom."

"It is that LIGHT which condenses into the forms of the 'Lords of Being' . . . — The Secret Doctrine 2:33

All the cells of the body are specialized to fulfill their various functions. For example, a muscle, liver, or blood cell is easily recognized as belonging to its own organ. But there is a further specialization for the different duties of any one organ: the liver, for example, has a variety of functions, and the cells grouped together for any one purpose are presided over and kept in order by their little brain, known as a ganglion. All of these ganglia are coordinated by the nervous apparatus of the liver as a whole, and all the organs of the body united by the central nervous system. There is instant and absolute communication between all the parts of this innumerable host; absolute obedience of each unit to its superior; and when in health, this little world moves in its orbit as serenely as the stars, without jar or friction, which might continue were it not for the discord injected into its ordered life by the unevolved intermediate nature of man, higher up on the scale. But the cells, basic units of the human body, are by no means the simple things they seem to be under the microscope. Smaller and smaller grows the pattern, but ever the small reflects the great.

those of animals, plants, and stones, are themselves altogether built up of such beings; which, except larger species, no microscope can detect. . . . Each particle — whether you call it organic or inorganic — *is a life*. Every atom and molecule in the Universe is both *life-giving* and *death-giving* to that form, inasmuch as it builds by aggregation universes and the ephemeral vehicles ready to receive the transmigrating soul, and as eternally destroys and changes the *forms* and expels those souls from their temporary abodes. It creates and kills; it is self-generating and self-destroying; it brings into being, and annihilates, that mystery of mysteries — the *living body* of man, animal, or plant, every second in time and space; . . . — Ibid., 1:260-1

It is by studying the small that we can infer the great, once we grasp the philosophy that is contained in the idea of analogy; once we realize that the universe is one organism, and that every lesser organism of whatever nature is an integral part of the whole, part of its nature and therefore essential to it. It is thus not a mere figure of speech to compare the human body to a universe, or the "spheres of being" (or stars and planets) to cells in the human body, for this body is verily an epitome of the whole. Perchance the organs of this whole may be great central suns, controlling lesser suns in an almost infinite series of gradations, whose planets may be atoms of this mighty entity. Analogy would lead us to infer a universal nervous system and circulations of life currents, purifying and rejuvenating every such cell, with its consciousness permeating everywhere.

Chapter 3

Source of These Teachings

The foregoing is but a sketchy outline of the hierarchical constitution of the universe, and before proceeding further it is pertinent to answer the question which must arise in the minds of those unfamiliar with these teachings as to the source from which they come. Are they inferences and guesses of some penetrating minds, arguing from particulars to universals? A study of this majestic philosophy will make it quite clear that no human mind could have evolved it. Only those far beyond the ordinary human stage would be capable of studying and recording the workings at the heart of nature.

Theosophy is the majestic wisdom-religion of the archaic ages and is as old as thinking man. It was delivered to the first human protoplasts, the first thinking human beings on this earth, by highly intelligent spiritual entities from superior spheres. This ancient doctrine, this esoteric system, has been passed down from guardians to guardians to guardians through innumerable generations until our own time. Furthermore, portions of this original and majestic system have been given out at various periods of time to various races in various parts of the world by those guardians when humanity stood in need of such extension and elaboration of spiritual and intellectual thought.

Theosophy is not a syncretistic philosophy-religion-science, a system of thought or belief which has been put together piecemeal and consisting of parts or portions taken by some great mind from other various religions or philosophies. This idea is false. On the contrary, theosophy is that single system or systematic formulation of the facts of visible and invisible nature which, as expressed through the illuminated human mind, takes the apparently separate forms of science and of philosophy and of religion. We may likewise describe theosophy to be the formulation in human language of the nature, structure, origin, destiny, and operations of the kosmical universe and of the multitudes of beings which infill it.

It might be added that theosophy, in the language of H. P. Blavatsky (*Theosophical Glossary*, p. 328), is "the sub-stratum and basis of all the world-religions and philosophies, taught and practiced by a few elect ever since man became a thinking being. In its practical bearing, Theosophy is purely *divine ethics*; . . . G. de Purucker, *Occult Glossary*



the early ages of humanity on this planet, great beings from other worlds came and impressed the minds of human beings with the facts of life, leaving a body of adepts referred to in H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* 281-2, as follows:

Alone a handful of primitive men — in whom the spark of divine Wisdom burnt bright, and only strengthened in its intensity as it got dimmer and dimmer with every age in those who turned it to bad purposes — remained the elect custodians of the Mysteries revealed to mankind by the divine Teachers. There were those among them, who remained in their *Kumaric* condition from the beginning; and tradition whispers, what the secret teachings affirm, namely, that these Elect were the germ of a Hierarchy *which never died since that period*: —

*"The inner man of the first * * * only changes his body from time to time; he is ever the same, knowing neither rest nor Nirvana, spurning Devachan and remaining constantly on Earth for the salvation of mankind. . . ."* *"Out of the seven virgin-men (Kumara) four sacrificed themselves for the sins of the world and the instruction of the ignorant, to remain till the end of the present Manvantara. Though unseen, they are ever present. When people say of one of them, "He is dead"; behold, he is alive and under another form. These are the Head, the Heart, the Soul, and the Seed of undying knowledge (Gnyana). Thou shalt never speak, O Lanoo, of these great ones (Maha . . .) before a multitude, mentioning them by their names. The wise alone will understand. . . ."* (Catechism of the inner Schools.)

It is from these that all the great adepts of history have descended. They are the guardians of humanity, and it is from among their number that from time to time in history the founders of the great religions have come among mankind. Referring to the method of studying the framework of nature, H. P. Blavatsky wrote:

The flashing gaze of those seers has penetrated into the very kernel of matter, and recorded the soul of things there, where an ordinary profane, however learned, would have perceived but the external work of form. . . . It is useless to say that the system in question is no fancy of one or several isolated individuals. That it is the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and to verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another, of the teachings of higher and exalted beings, who watched over the childhood of Humanity. That for long ages, the "Wise Men" of the Fifth Race, of the stock saved and rescued from the last cataclysm and shifting of continents, had passed their lives *in learning, not teaching*. How did they do so? It is answered: by checking, testing, and verifying in every department of nature the traditions of old by the independent visions of great adepts; *i. e.*, men who have developed and perfected their physical, mental, psychic, and spiritual organizations to the utmost possible degree. No vision of one adept was accepted till it was checked and confirmed by the visions — so obtained as to stand as independent evidence — of other adepts, and by centuries of experiences. -- *The Secret Doctrine* 1:272-3

Such is our authority for the teachings of the hierarchical constitution of the universe, presented not in a dogmatic sense, but as an explanation, the acceptance of which each one must decide for himself. This has been, indeed, prior to the last century, an esoteric teaching for our historical period, and the fact that it is now given on a printed page seems to contain a hopeful promise of present possibilities.

The following definition of a hierarchy from this heretofore esoteric standpoint is quoted from G. de Purucker's *Occult Glossary*:

The name is used by theosophists, by extension of meaning, as signifying the innumerable degrees, grades, and steps of evolving entities in the kosmos, and as applying to all parts of the universe; and rightly so, because every different part of the universe — and their number is simply countless — is

The series of hierarchies extends infinitely in both directions. If he so choose for purposes of thought, man may consider himself at the middle point, from which extends above him an unending series of steps upon steps of higher beings of all grades — growing constantly less material and more spiritual, and greater in all senses — towards an ineffable point. And there the imagination stops, not because the series itself stops, but because our thought can reach no farther out nor in. And similar to *this* series, an infinitely great series of beings and states of beings descends downwards (to use human terms) — downwards and downwards, until there again the imagination stops, merely because our thought can go no farther.

The summit, the acme, the flower, the highest point (or the hyparxis) of any series of animate and "inanimate" beings, whether we enumerate the stages or degrees of the series as seven or ten or twelve (according to whichever system we follow), is the divine unity for that series or hierarchy, and this hyparxis or highest being is again in its turn the lowest being of the hierarchy above it, and so extending onwards forever — each hierarchy manifesting one facet of the divine kosmic life, each hierarchy showing forth one thought, as it were, of the divine thinkers.

Various names were given to these hierarchies considered as series of beings. The generalized Greek hierarchy as shown by writers in periods preceding the rise of Christianity may be collected and enumerated as follows: (1) Divine; (2) Gods, or the divine-spiritual; (3) Demigods, sometimes called divine heroes, involving a very mystical doctrine; (4) Heroes proper; (5) Men; (6) Beasts or animals; (7) Vegetable world; (8) Mineral world; (9) Elemental world, or what was called the realm of Hades. The Divinity (or aggregate divine lives) itself is the hyparxis of this series of hierarchies, because each of these nine stages is itself a subordinate hierarchy. This (or any other) hierarchy of nine, hangs like a pendant jewel from the lowest hierarchy above it, which makes the tenth counting upwards, which tenth we can call the superdivine, the hyperheavenly, this tenth being the lowest stage (or the ninth, counting downwards) of still another hierarchy extending upwards; and so on, indefinitely.

One of the noblest of the theosophical teachings, and one of the most far-reaching in its import, is that of the hierarchical constitution of universal nature. This hierarchical structure of nature is so fundamental, so basic, that it may be truly called the structural framework of being.

UNIVERSALITY OF THE TEACHING

Echoes of this ancient teaching can be found more or less plainly stated in India, Japan, and Egypt. The scheme in the Neoplatonic philosophy has just been given in the definition of a hierarchy. This was copied from the Greeks, as taught by Plato, and the Christian scheme which has been alluded to earlier, was patterned after the same with different names. The Syrians had a similar system, using their special terms, likewise the Babylonians. The Kabbala referred to the Ladder of Life. All of these were exoteric inasmuch as the real key to their full meaning was withheld, but they show how widely spread were the ideas, and indicate a common source from which they all sprang. They at least show that a belief in a gradation of power and authority in the inner spheres was general; that there was understood to be a multiplicity of gods working together in their appropriate realms and conducting the affairs of the universe. It took the dark ages to develop the degenerate belief in an extra-cosmic God who personally attended to the affairs of the universe. Now, however, it is being recognized that the God of theology is a logical impossibility. The perfect God premised should have made perfect beings living in a perfect world. But facts, as we know them, indicate that evolving, learning entities are working their way to freedom and knowledge. Every grade or plane or station must have its guides, infallible in relation to the territory they have conquered, but still fallible in their own spheres, while they too must have their guides, infallible to them, and so on infinitely. The ancient wisdom taught constant growth and evolution; imperfection ever working toward perfection, to be attained in the sphere inhabited for the time. Thus we see law and order and design in the universe as a whole, which yet provides the schools in which learning entities can grow through their experience and profit by their mistakes.

higher Powers; but they are not "the personifications" of the powers of Nature, as erroneously thought. This hierarchy of spiritual Beings, through which the Universal Mind comes into action, is like an army — a "Host," truly — by means of which the fighting power of a nation manifests itself, and which is composed of army corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, and so forth, each with its separate individuality or life, and its limited freedom of action and limited responsibilities; each contained in a larger individuality, to which its own interests are subservient, and each containing lesser individualities in itself. — *The Secret Doctrine* 1:38

Chapter 4

Man's Composite Nature as a Hierarchy

We have spoken of the human body as a hierarchy. This may be more easily grasped than the idea that man as a whole is a larger hierarchy of which the body is the lowest, the simplest, and least important. Christians have been used to the idea that we are composed of body, soul, and spirit, but the real philosophical meaning has been lost to the West for centuries, and the average person has been content to think chiefly of the body, while holding a vague idea that he has a soul as well. While this threefold classification is correct in a general way, for more careful analysis of the human being, the ancient teaching describes us as a sevenfold (or tenfold) entity, or expressed in another way, as an entity having seven principles or aspects. Each one of these aspects, like the body, is a hierarchical entity, having its own individual system, but working with the larger hierarchy under the hierarchy.

These principles or entities are (1) *atman*, the essential self; (2) *buddhi*, the faculty or spiritual organ in man, manifesting itself as intuition, understanding, discrimination, etc.; (3) *manas*, the center or organ of the human ego-consciousness, and therefore the producing cause of the "I am I"; (4) *kama*, the seat of the impulses, desires, aspirations, and therefore the driving force in the human constitution; (5) *prana*, the "electrical field" manifesting in the human as vitality; (6) *linga-sarira*, the astral model body; and (7) *sthula-sarira*, the physical body. Number 3, manas or mind, has a higher and lower portion, which latter and the four lower principles have yet to gain their immortality. This word "immortality" is here used in a special sense. Nothing that exists can ever cease to exist, of course, since all units are part of the whole. But the lower principles have not yet evolved to the point of self understanding and mastery, which is their destiny in the eternities to come.

A less analytical classification includes the upper duad, namely, atman and buddhi, as spirit; the intermediate duad, namely, manas and kama, as soul; and the lower triad as body.

Here we are only outlining the human constitution from the hierarchical standpoint. Seven parts or principles have been mentioned, but in truth, as has been said, every hierarchy consists of ten, three of which, in our case, are unmanifested, at least so far as we are concerned. Further, there are two more, one connecting any hierarchy with the one above it, and one with the hierarchy below it, making twelve in every system.

A little reflection will reveal that this teaching about human beings as being many in One is in harmony with universal experience. Impulse, emotion, thought or impersonal love, directs every human act, the motive and quality depending upon the center in which the consciousness is resting, which may be either high or low. Very highly evolved individuals work from their spiritual center, which sends its impulses down through the whole nature eventuating in noble thoughts and deeds. These impulses are felt but feebly in the undeveloped person who more frequently centers his consciousness in his unevolved, uncertain, and vacillating intermediate nature. But whether high or low, every impulse comes to the body from above or within, expressing itself in speech, thought, or action. And the within and the without are evidently one organism, acting together simultaneously.

will or volition, and thought or mind. As no outward motion or change, when normal, in man's external body can take place unless provoked by an inward impulse, given through one of the three functions named, so with the external or manifested Universe. The whole Kosmos is guided, controlled, and animated by almost endless series of Hierarchies of sentient Beings, each having a mission to perform, and who — whether we give to them one name or another, and call them Dhyan-Chohans or Angels — are "messengers" in the sense only that they are the agents of Karmic and Cosmic Laws. They vary infinitely in their respective degrees of consciousness and intelligence; and to call them all pure Spirits without any of the earthly alloy "which time is wont to prey upon" is only to indulge in poetical fancy. For each of these Beings either *was*, or prepares to become, a man, if not in the present, then in a past or a coming cycle (Manvantara). They are *perfected*, when not *incipient*, men; and differ morally from the terrestrial human beings on their higher (less material) spheres, only in that they are devoid of the feeling of personality and of the *human* emotional nature — two purely earthly characteristics. -- *The Secret Doctrine* 1:274-5

Chapter 5

The Infinite and Eternal Cause of Being

The underdeveloped individual has always stood in awe of the mystery of life. Only mystics have found within themselves some answer to the eternal questions, "Whence did I come?" "Whither shall I go?" Exoteric religions of the West have referred the origin of all things to a God — a God colored, of course, by mankind's own various and immature conceptions of perfection. But the ancient wisdom, the fountain-head from which all religions have flowed, in whatever form it has been presented to humanity during all the millions of years since the human host was evolved on this globe, states that this form has always been built around the basic central premises of a boundless principle, which had no beginning and can have no end; in which all beings exist, from which all proceed, and to which all eventually return. It is the eternal IS, and the eternal NOW. All speculation concerning it is impossible, as a part cannot comprehend the whole of which it is a part. It is the one reality, amidst the phantasmagoria of the never ceasing and eternally changing movements of life. It is the noumenon behind all phenomena.

This principle we know to be true, not only because such is the assertion of the ancient wisdom as it has been presented today, and therefore as it must have been presented in the past, but also because the rational mind accepts it as inevitable. This boundless principle manifests and withdraws, sleeps and wakes. The great universe is active during its day, then darkness and silence reign over space. In the poetical symbolism of the ancients, it is described as the inbreathing and outbreathing of Brahma. In the outbreathing a new universe comes into being, yet it is but the old reborn. In the inbreathing all returns to silence and darkness. So it is with solar systems, so it is with planets, with races of mankind as a whole; with individuals; with atoms.

The formation of crystals from a saturated solution of certain substances may offer a suggestion to some minds. The heated solution is clear and transparent, then quietly as the liquid cools, beautiful starry crystals appear as if by magic, now here, now there, while the liquid is not decreased or diminished. In our undeveloped state and with our finite minds it is not to be supposed that we can grasp these transcendent facts except in broad outline. Yet we can work in the direction of truth and absorb enough to guide us along the path which all must tread.

The universe reimbodies itself . . . following precisely the analogical lines that the soul of man does in reincarnating, making the necessary allowances for varying conditions. As man is the product of his former life, or rather of his lives, so is a universe, a solar system, a planet, an animal, an atom — the very great as well as the so-called infinitesimal — the fruitage, the flower, of what went before. Each

various subdivisions of such races, in such measure and form as would fit the needs and understanding of these respective eras. There have been greater civilizations in the past than those we know today. There are times when more advanced souls are in incarnation than at other times, and naturally a great teacher would present the teachings about life in a form best fitted to the mental development of those who are to receive them, though basically the teachings would be the same. So it must always be, and the fact that such has been the case is corroborated by a variety of evidence from as far back as our historical records reach. The great religions can be shown to have had a common origin, but even without such overwhelming support from history, the assertion that there must be those advance guards of humanity, equipped to hand down such ancient teachings, is a belief which one cannot escape if evolution be accepted as a fact. And evolution is before our eyes every moment of our lives. We see everything growing in all the kingdoms. Children grow to adult age, and adults often unfold glorious qualities in their natures, showing the possibilities, the trend of human life, and suggesting, almost declaring thereby, that some men, during the long past, must have reached a godlike status, fitted to be great teachers to their younger brothers.

History again confirms this inference in the outstanding figures of Gautama Buddha, Krishna, Lao-Tse, Jesus, Quetzalcoatl, and others. It is true that these teachings invariably degenerate, more or less according to the relative darkness of the cycle in which they were given. Yet even in the Christian childish conception of a personal God — a great cosmic man who is beseeched to grant favors to one over another — even in this travesty of the original teaching it is possible to discern the distorted outlines of the true picture.

"Thus there is but one Absolute Upadhi (basis) in the spiritual sense, from, on, and in which, are built for Manvantaric purposes the countless basic centres on which proceed the Universal, cyclic, and individual Evolutions during the active period."

"The informing Intelligences, which animate these various centres of Being, are referred to indiscriminately by men beyond the Great Range as the Manus, the Rishis, the Pitris, the Prajapati, and so on; and as Dhyani Buddhas, the Chohans, Melhas (fire-gods), Bodhisattvas, and others, on this side. The truly ignorant call them gods; the learned profane, the one God; and the wise, the Initiates, honour in them only the Manvantaric manifestation of THAT which neither our Creators (the Dhyan Chohans) nor their creatures can ever discuss or know anything about. The ABSOLUTE is not to be defined, and no mortal or immortal has ever seen or comprehended it during the periods of Existence. The mutable cannot know the Immutable, nor can that which lives perceive Absolute Life." -- The Secret Doctrine 2:34

This fundamental proposition of a boundless underlying principle is recalled here because it must be the real starting point, from within, of our study of hierarchies.

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